



Children and Family Services
Training Center
Department of Social Work
University of North Dakota

Fostering Communications

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Fall 2005

Building a Network of People in the Foster Care System

Vol. XIX No. 3

A Glimpse at the Foster Care and Child Welfare System in ND – Past and Present

By Del Hager

Understanding the Language

Terminology. Phraseology. Communication. Sometimes we hear words and phrases that we think we know the meaning to, only to find out that what we thought we heard and what someone else meant, are two very different things. What used to be cool is now kewl and what used to be hot is now probably cool and getting colder. What was funny is now :) and sad is :(in computer language. We don't journal, we blog; and, we assess everything!

The human services field is one of the most notorious institutions for using terminology, especially acronyms that no one outside the agency can understand and many insiders find confusing as well. It doesn't help when laws and policies are in a constant state of flux because of political changes at every level from the Presidential administration on down to the lowest unit of local government.

How do we know when change is for the better or if it's just a change that will run its normal course and nothing substantial will actually be accomplished? Case in point: As a foster parent, what exactly do you know about each of the following and what does it really mean to you? ASFA; CFSR; Title IV-B; Title IV-E; Safety, Permanence and Well-Being; Family Social Work Practice; Wraparound; Pew Commission; PIP; Social Security Act; and SPOC? Any ideas?

Program History

Let's start with the Adoption Assistance and Child Welfare Act of 1980 (often referred to as PL96-272) where goals were set that helped to preserve families and seek permanent living arrangements for children. Permanency Planning Teams and so-called "Perm Plan" meetings were begun during this time. Programs to prevent child abuse and neglect, better attempts at preserving families, and more effective court involvement were among the changes that occurred. It was quite a positive change but still, problems continued to haunt the foster care program nationwide so

new standards were proposed.

"Foster care drift" was a phrase used in the 1980's and 1990's that referred to the problem of children languishing in foster care and drifting from one foster care setting to another while the "system" did little to find permanent homes for them. Social service agencies experienced dramatic increases in caseloads along with limited resources to provide rehabilitative services for the parents of the foster children. The result was a system that was failing the caseworkers, the families and the children they were charged to protect.

Along came the next piece of major federal legislation, the Adoption and Safe Families Act (ASFA) of 1997. Again we saw goal setting and a push toward a more systemic approach by agencies to take new steps toward meeting the needs of abused and neglected children while supporting troubled families. Safety, permanence and well-being were the new buzzwords with a heavy emphasis on permanence. ASFA put added pressure on the court system by charging them with the responsibility to move cases more quickly from temporary custody to termination of parental rights or permanent guardianship. The goal of adoption became a permanency goal for children in the foster care system when it was determined that they could no longer return to their birth parents.

Despite all these efforts, there were 534,000 children in foster care in the United States in 2002, nearly twice as many as in the early 1980's. In federal fiscal year 2001, nearly 39,000 infants under the age of one entered foster care and about 19,000 older youth "aged out" of foster care without a permanent family to support them in the transition to adulthood. Other national statistics tell us that on average, children will have three moves while in foster care. Lifelong consequences around loyalty and mistrust can result from this kind of uncertainty.

In North Dakota there were 1,935 children reported to

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From the State Office

By Don Snyder, Foster Care Administrator

It has always been a challenge for 18 year old youth to transition into successful adult living. However, youth in foster care have even less support and assistance in making this transition. Research is showing outcomes for youth, on a national level, are dismal. North Dakota youth are struggling with some of the same bleak outcomes.

Challenges faced by foster youth nationwide include:

Low Wages - They are not working full time or earning minimum wages.

Low Rates of High School Completion - Fewer are going to college than the general population.

High Criminal Activity - 35% are arrested

High Death Rate - Suicide rate is 17 times the rate of peers and accident rates are 4 times higher than peers.

High Birth Rate - 3 times higher than their peer group and 3% are paying for child support for their own children in foster care.

Great Need for Medical and Mental Health Services - Youth in foster care have an average of 10 conditions needing treatment.

Research published in October 2005, titled "The Foster Care Alumni Studies"* demonstrate many interesting possibilities and issues for all of us. This research will have an impact on how we look at youth in foster care and it will assist in assuring we are doing all we can for youth transitioning out of care to adulthood. Interviews were conducted with foster youth alumni between the ages of 20 and 33; 61% were female; and, the average length of time in care was 6 years. The research was reported to the National Foster Care Managers meeting in Washington, DC, on October 24, 2005, and included the following recommendation:

- Education—Encourage youth not to settle for a GED but to support better preparation for postsecondary education programs.
- Employment—Help youth get employment experience with good supervision. Strengthen connections with vocational and employment services.
- Mental Health Services—Increase youth access to evidence-based mental health treatment, and increase mental health insurance coverage.

*Peter Pecora is the principal investigator for the Northwest and National Alumni studies. The research was conducted by the staff of the Casey Family Programs, Harvard Medical School, Oregon Department of Human Services, Washington Department of Health and Human Services, The Northwest Alumni Studies Team, Youth, Alumni, Parents and Casey Field Staff. The complete study is available by contacting Peter Pecora at ppecora@casey.org or Don Snyder, North Dakota Foster Care Administrator, 600 East Boulevard Avenue, Bismarck, ND, 58505.

(Editors note: Don Snyder, Permanency Unit Manager and Administrator for the foster care program for the North Dakota Department of Human Services has been elected to the board of directors of the National Association of Foster Care Managers. Snyder will serve a two-year term representing foster care managers across the United States.)



Awards

By Vicki Hoff

The North Dakota Foster Parent of The Year Award was presented to Leonard and Helen Berger of Bismarck. They have been licensed for nearly 20 years and have cared for about 125 children. Helen has been Vice-President and President of the Region VII FPA and Chair of Membership and Conference Committees for the NDFPA.

The NDFPA Scholarship of \$600 and The Ruth Meier Scholarship of \$500 went to Amanda Dahl of Tioga. Her foster parents are Dennis and Julie Jacobson. Amanda attends Trinity Bible College in Ellendale and is planning to major in Psychology/Counseling or Social Work.

President's Corner

By James Schnabel



Once again the annual state conference has come and gone and it was great renewing old acquaintances and meeting new ones.

We elected a new secretary, Doreen Saylor, a pharmacist, from Valley City. We are excited that she has accepted this challenge and look forward to an exciting year. We are still looking for individuals to fill our committee positions so that much can be accomplished in the coming year. As foster parents, we are all very busy but we need individuals who are willing to give a little of their time to make things better for children and their fellow foster parents.

I see many unique challenges looming on the horizon in foster care and I am confident that foster parents and the NDFPA will meet those challenges head on. If you are already a member of the NDFPA, THANK YOU; if you are not, I would encourage you to consider joining. There is strength in numbers and the support and encouragement you receive is invaluable.

I wish all of you a blessed year as you stand on the front lines for children and look forward to a great year for the NDFPA.

NDFPA Conference Re-cap

By Donna Beaulac, NDFPA President-elect

MISSION:

The North Dakota Foster Parent Association is committed to supporting quality foster care of children by providing education, advocacy and resources for ND foster parents.

"Great line up of speakers!" "I enjoyed the Saturday keynote speaker." These were just some of the comments from the over 120 individuals who attended the annual Foster parent conference in Bismarck, September 30-October 1.

The theme of the conference, "Children Are Our Most Precious Resource" carried through the training events and subjects layed out for us to attend. On Friday afternoon there were opportunities to complete annual training requirements for Fire Safety, First Aid and CPR re-certification. Friday evening continued with a Fire Safety class and extinguisher demonstration. Marcia Tabram Philips, author of "I Love You More Than Chocolate" began our weekend focus on child nurturing with basic elements of a family environment. Saturday was packed with well-known speakers, such as Heidi Heitkamp, who thrilled everyone with her positive encouragement and her offer to advocate for foster parents statewide. A judicial panel consisting of a district court judge, court liaison, and juvenile court supervisor answered questions about the various elements of court orders and judicial aspects of foster care. Concurrent sessions on Saturday afternoon included Educational Advocacy, Food Hoarding, Attachment Disorders, and Methamphetamines.

State President, James Schnabel, led the NDFPA business meeting with a PowerPoint agenda, election of the office of secretary, overview of goals, and committee focus for the upcoming year. A delicious pasta bar lunch was served to over 80 members who participated in bylaws review; regional startups and increased membership; establish rules for the Mini Grant; expansion of membership to include adoptive parents; advocacy within the legislative realm; and the possible development of a website.

Increased membership and participation in our state organization means the difference between helping to better the "system" for the foster children we care for or, at least, status quo. Membership is automatic if you made payment for the annual conference. Please get involved and support the organization whether by payment of your membership dues or becoming active on a committee. Your participation in the upcoming year can produce extremely useful results in advocating for important issues in foster care. Call or write any of the members of the Board of Directors as listed in this newsletter.

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be in foster care in 2002 (Federal Fiscal Year) while only 1,080 were in care during the State Fiscal Year of 1987. How could this dramatic increase happen? Or, perhaps a better question, how can we effectively establish the goals of providing safety, permanence and well-being for the children? Perhaps an answer could come from the Adoption and Safe Families Act.

An added focus of ASFA was on measuring state's performance with respect to meeting a set of national standards. States were required to prove that they could keep foster children safe, protect their well-being, and insure them a permanent living arrangement, or face financial sanctions. Stakeholders including courts, county social service agencies, law enforcement, states attorneys, tribes, staff from the Department of Human Services, foster parents and many others were asked to form collaborative groups that would evaluate programs and policies as they relate to the implementation of the ASFA mandates.

Federal Reviews

Beginning in 2001, the federal Department of Health and Human Services didn't just tell the states to comply with ASFA requirements, they sent teams of federal officials out to all 50 states to conduct a Children and Family Services Review (CFSR) of ASFA outcomes for children and families involved in the child welfare system. Prior to the CFSR, the states were asked to submit a Children and Family Services State Plan for how they were to achieve the outcomes mandated by ASFA. Previously, reviews or audits looked at accuracy of record keeping and management of files but this review focused on results by assessing strengths and areas needing improvement. This process became a major challenge for all states but at the same time, a positive and productive opportunity.

Cass, Burleigh, and Grand Forks counties were chosen as the first review sites and stakeholders from around the state were interviewed. The review teams looked at seven outcomes and seven systemic factors. Remember, ASFA requires states to assure that children do not languish in foster care and that their safety and well-being are protected. The review teams evaluated the following:

Outcomes:

Safety

- Children are, first and foremost, protected from abuse and neglect.
- Children are safely maintained in their homes whenever possible and appropriate.

Permanence

- Children have permanency and stability in their living situations.
- The continuity of family relationships and connections is preserved for children.

Child and Family Well-Being

- Families have enhanced capacity to provide for their children's needs.
- Children receive appropriate services to meet their educational needs.
- Children receive appropriate services to meet their

physical and mental health needs.

Systemic Factors:

The seven systemic factors considered essential to deliver high quality services include:

- Statewide information system
- Case review system
- Quality assurance system
- Staff training
- Array of services
- Agency responsiveness
- Foster and adoptive parent licensing, recruitment and retention.

The results of the review were quite interesting. First of all, no state achieved "substantial conformity" with all 14 federal standards or outcomes. In other words, no one passed. Every state had areas of strength and areas where they need to improve upon their performance. Consequently, states were asked to present a Program Improvement Plan (PIP) to the feds. North Dakota exceeded the federal standard in nine of the fourteen outcomes, which was better than any other state. We were the only state to achieve conformity in all seven systemic factors. We can be very proud of the strengths in our system.

The review identified the following areas needing improvement:

- Repeat Maltreatment – this refers to additional reports of suspected abuse or neglect related to a specific perpetrator (subject of a report).
- Foster Care Re-Entries – this refers to children who enter foster care, return home, and end up back in a foster care setting.
- Worker Visits With The Child
- Worker Visits With Parents

National research indicates that the re-entry of children into the foster care system is often related to the quantity and quality of worker visits with children and parents and the meaningful involvement of children and parents in their own case planning. This was identified as an area needing improvement in North Dakota.

The review process didn't end after the federal government sent their teams to North Dakota in 2001. The Department of Human Services modeled an internal review process after the federal review and has looked at cases, interviewed stakeholders and interviewed families involved with the child welfare system in all 8 regions during 2003, 2004 and 2005. Improvements were noted each year. The 2001 federal review indicated an overall compliance rating of 83%. The 2005 review conducted by North Dakota reviewers who looked at the same criteria as the feds did in 2001, found a 98.9% conformance with safety, permanency and well-being standards. The Northeast Region (Grand Forks) and the West Central Region (Bismarck) received a 100% rating. The next federal review is scheduled for 2007.

ND PIP will Implement Wraparound

The North Dakota Child Welfare Services Program Improvement Plan (PIP) dated November 13, 2003, is a document consisting of more than thirty pages detailing the three major components of the plan. It can be found in its entirety on the Department of Human Services web page.

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The components are:

- *Implementation of the Wraparound Process case management model.* The cornerstone of the plan to meet the requirements of ASFA is the Wraparound Process case management model. Much has already gone into the implementation of Wraparound including the training and certification of approximately 220 child welfare social workers among the more than 470 trained professionals from around the state. It will affect almost all aspects of the child welfare system in North Dakota. Wraparound offers a complete array of values and principles built into the team driven process that will actually bring positive help to families by pulling together multiple agencies and multiple services.
- *Implementation of an initiative that mirrors the CFSR process.* As previously stated, reviews have been conducted in all counties of the state in accordance with the federal standards. Compliance with the safety, permanency and well being standards of ASFA have repeatedly improved with the passage of time since the initial federal review in 2001.
- *Training and curriculum development for caseworkers and supervisors.* The purpose of this component is to strengthen, support and provide updated tools for the direct service workers in the field. Child Welfare Certification Training (for all new social workers), Family Home Assessment Training (for foster and adopt home licensing social workers), PRIDE Foster/Adopt Training (opportunities are there for social workers and foster or adopt parents), Parent Aide Training, Wraparound certification and re-certification training, supervisory training and program policy training are some of the opportunities offered by the University of North Dakota Children and Family Services Training Center in partnership with the Children and Family Services Division, Department of Human Services. Other training sessions are available and planned on an “as needed” basis.

Funding Sources

There are almost as many funding sources as there are services being offered in the human services field. This can be a blessing in some cases where you know a specific funding source is able to provide all the needs of the program; but, it can be a problem in other situations when the lack of spending flexibility limits the assistance you would like to provide to a family or individual in need. Federal Title IV-E funds are available to support foster care payments for eligible children, adoption assistance payments, and related administrative and training costs. This is the largest source of federal dollars coming into the state Department of Human Services. Historically, there has not been a cap on the amount of money states can receive to cover the allowable expenses under Title IV-E. Today, North Dakota may be faced with a reduction in the amount of IV-E dollars it can receive because of a change in the formula for accessing that money. Some of the other program funds

come from Federal Title IV-B parts I and II, Child Abuse Prevention and Treatment Act, Title IV-A (TANF), Title XIX (Medicaid), along with state and local General Funds.

This past spring, North Dakota went through a stringent Federal Review of its Title IV-E payments and was notified that it had passed the review. Six federal officials and eight reviewers from North Dakota looked at 80 cases to see if proper funds were spent for food, shelter, daily supervision, school supplies, reasonable travel home for visits, and insurance for foster children. They also looked at court orders and eligibility determination.

About the Pew Commission

On May 18, 2004, the nonpartisan Pew Commission on Children and Foster Care (funded by a grant from the PEW Charitable Trusts to the Georgetown Public Policy Institute) released a report titled, *Fostering Our Future: Safety, Permanency, and Well-Being for Children in Foster Care* thus completing their year-long work to develop recommendations for improving outcomes for children in the foster care system. In particular, they looked for ways to move children from foster care into safe, permanent, nurturing families, and to prevent unnecessary placements into foster care in the first place.

The Pew Commission report states:

“The Commission is chaired by Bill Frenzel, former Republican Congressman and currently Guest Scholar at the Brookings Institution. The Vice Chair is William Gray, III, former Democratic Congressman and currently President and CEO of the United Negro College Fund. Mr. Frenzel and Mr. Gray are well known for their expertise in the federal budgeting process and for their ability to forge consensus across party lines. The Commission includes some of the nation’s leading child welfare experts, administrators of child welfare agencies, judges, social workers, a state legislator, a child psychologist, foster and adoptive parents, a former foster youth, and others. These are people who know the system well—both its assets and its limitations.

The Commission met intensively, exploring a broad range of key issues in child welfare. It listened to judges who oversee dependency cases, managers who administer child welfare systems, and caseworkers with daily, frontline responsibility for children. It also listened to other professionals, scholars, and advocates; to foster, adoptive, and birth parents; and to young people themselves. It closely examined critical problems and promising approaches.

The Commission focused its work on two targeted areas:

- Improving existing federal financing mechanisms to facilitate faster movement of children from foster care into safe, permanent families and to reduce the need to place children in foster care in the first place.
- Improving court oversight of child welfare cases to facilitate better and more timely decisions related to children’s safety, permanence and well-being.

Guiding Principles for the Work of the Pew Commission

Preamble: All children must have safe, permanent

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families in which their physical, emotional and social needs are met. When children are abused or neglected, these fundamental needs are not met. The recommendations of the Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care focus on improving the circumstances for children who are served by the child welfare system, whether in foster care or in their own homes.

The Commission's work was guided by the following principles:

1. Children must be physically and emotionally safe and must be protected wherever they live. When children are removed from their homes, public authorities have an obligation to ensure that they are safer in out-of-home care than they would have been at home.
2. Children must have their needs met in a timely manner at every stage of their development and every stage of public decision making about their futures.
3. Children must have continuity and consistency in caregiving and relationships, including healthy ties to siblings and extended family.
4. Children must have equal protection and care, including attention to meeting children's needs in the context of their community and culture.
5. Children and their families must have an informed voice in decisions that are made about their lives.

Key Components of the Commission's Financing Recommendations

- Preserving federal foster care maintenance and adoption assistance as an entitlement and expanding it to all children, regardless of their birth families' income and including Indian children in the U.S. territories;
- Providing federal guardianship assistance to all children who leave foster care to live with a permanent legal guardian when a court has explicitly determined that neither reunification nor adoption are feasible permanence options;
- Helping states build a range of services from prevention, to treatment, to post permanence by (1) creating a flexible, indexed Safe Children, Strong Families Grant from what is currently included in Title IV-B and the administration and training components of Title IV-E; and (2) allowing states to "reinvest" federal and state foster care dollars into other child welfare services if they safely reduce their use of foster care.
- Encouraging innovation by expanding and simplifying the waiver process and providing incentives to states that (1) make and maintain improvements in their child welfare workforce and (2) increase all forms of safe permanence; and
- Strengthening the current Child and Family Services Review process to increase states' accountability for improving outcomes for children.

The Commission's Court Recommendations

- Adoption of court performance measures by every dependency court to ensure that they can track and

analyze their caseloads, increase accountability for improved outcomes for children, and to inform decisions about the allocation of court resources;

- Incentives and requirements for effective collaboration between courts and child welfare agencies on behalf of children in foster care;
- A strong voice for children and parents in court and effective representation by better trained attorneys and volunteer advocates;
- Leadership from Chief Justices and other state court leaders in organizing their court systems to better serve children, provide training for judges, and promote more effective standards for dependency courts, judges, and attorneys.

Final Statement by the Commission

"Our charge was to develop a practical set of policy recommendations to reform federal child welfare financing and strengthen court oversight of child welfare cases. Designing the perfect child welfare system would have been easy. Designing proposals that could win bipartisan support in Washington and in the states was a much harder task. Our proposals are the result of hard choices and difficult compromises. We think they are bold, fair, and achievable. We hope they will spur thoughtful discussion, and we urge swift implementation."

For more information on the Pew Commission on Children and Foster Care

www.pewfostercare.org

The Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care
www.fosteringresults.org/results/reports.htm

Fostering Results/Children and Family Resource Center at the School of Social Work, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign

www.cwla.org/advocacy/pewcommissionsummary.htm

Child Welfare League of America's Pew Commission Summary Report

www.childrensdefense.org/childwelfare/legislative/child_safe_act_factsheet.pdf

Children's Defense Fund Child SAFE Act Fact Sheet

Children and Family Services Training Center at the University of North Dakota has a booklet, *FOSTERING THE FUTURE: Strengthening Courts for Children in Foster Care*, along with a DVD that tells the story of the Pew Commission on Children in Foster Care. The booklet and DVD can be checked out of the library by calling CFSTC at 701-777-3442.

Now what?

Legislation at the federal level was recently introduced as a first step toward meeting the challenges proposed by the Pew Commission and that were discovered during the federal and state CFS Reviews. All of us who are "stakeholders" and active participants in the North Dakota child welfare system should consider finding ways to actively follow any policy or legislative changes that will impact our citizens.

Our state and our nation have a huge responsibility awaiting us in the field of child welfare. All the old terminology and phrases and, yes, the technology, are

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quickly being replaced with 21st century communications. Programs and policies are changing now that systems are looking critically at positive outcomes that are the responsibility of whole “communities” of agencies, including the courts, to achieve. Children can’t “drift” in the foster care system, they must have permanency; the abuse and neglect can’t go on – our children must be safe and nurtured; and, the fundamental rights of the children and the families who enter the child welfare system must be protected in order to assure them the highest quality of care they deserve.

Information for this article was obtained from the North Dakota Department of Human Services web site – www.state.nd.us/humanservices and from the Pew Commission report titled, “FOSTERING THE FUTURE: Safety, Permanence and Well-Being for Children in Foster Care.”

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*Have a
Happy Thanksgiving
and a
Wonderful Holiday Season*

